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Security Council

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Thursday, 10 May 2007, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Khalilzad	(United States of America)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	United Kingdom	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

Security Council mission

Report of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue (S/2007/256)

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07-33839 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council mission

Report of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue (S/2007/256)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2007/256, containing the report of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue.

At this meeting, the Council will hear a briefing by Ambassador Johan Verbeke, Permanent Representative of Belgium and Head of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Verbeke.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium): On 2 May, I had the opportunity to brief the Council on the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue, in my capacity as Head of the Mission. At that time, I recalled the nature and the objectives of the mission. I also briefly commented on some of the highlights of its programme.

After last week's meeting, Council members worked together and agreed on the mission's report, which was then distributed by the Secretariat as an official United Nations document. Since the Council is familiar with the content of the report, I will limit this briefing to a brief overview of some of its conclusions.

Security is an essential pillar of any society, and this is even more so for societies emerging from violent and brutal conflict such as that in Kosovo. The current security situation in Kosovo is often defined as "calm but tense", and this is also how NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer described it when we met him in Brussels on 25 April. The mission's report subscribes to that assessment. While the situation is calm, the conflict of 1998-1999 and the violence that shook Kosovo in March 2004 have left their traces.

One of those traces is that to a large extent Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs still live separately from each other. Full and lasting reconciliation, with a view to the establishment of a truly multi-ethnic society, will require a sustainable commitment by all stakeholders. During the mission's meetings with Kosovo's leaders, including Prime Minister Ceku and President Sejdiu, they all emphasized their committed to a multi-ethnic society and their readiness to work responsibly towards that goal.

Achieving that goal will to a large extent depend on continued implementation of the standards for Kosovo. Over the years, the Provisional Institutions, with the support of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, managed to make serious progress in this regard. More is to be done, as was recognized by Prime Minister Ceku and other Kosovo leaders, who, in meetings with the mission, expressed their commitment to continue and strengthen standards implementation.

This is particularly important in two fields that received considerable attention during the mission's visit to the region — the living conditions of Kosovo's non-Albanian communities, and the return of internally displaced persons, a critical element in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). Interlocutors in Belgrade, including President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica, as well as representatives of Serbian civil society, stressed that the number of returns continued to be very low, despite the fact that, as the mission noticed in Svinjare, houses have been rebuilt and, more generally, that structures to facilitate returns are in place. During the mission's visit several explanations were given, such as the lack of economic prospects or security-related concerns. The mission heard opposing views on the question as to whether a solution to the status of Kosovo would facilitate or hinder the return process.

More than in previous Security Council missions to the region, the status issue was a very important, if not dominant, element. On Kosovo's status, the positions of the sides remain far apart. Authorities in Belgrade, as well as Kosovo Serbs who expressed themselves on the issue, firmly rejected any form of independence for Kosovo, in particular the settlement proposal presented to this Council by Special Envoy Ahtisaari. They asked for further negotiations, which should lead to a solution based on substantial

autonomy. In general, the Kosovo Serb community is apprehensive about its prospects for the future.

The Kosovo Albanian community, on the other hand, is confident about its future; it has very high expectations for an early resolution of Kosovo's status — a status that brings independence to Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians, as well as non-Serb minority communities, expressed strong support for Mr. Ahtisaari's settlement proposal and status recommendation, and they look to the Security Council to move rapidly to a solution.

Despite the strongly opposed positions, both parties agree that the status quo is not sustainable. That message was also brought to us by representatives of NATO and the European Union, who are prepared to take up their responsibilities and look to the Security Council to provide the necessary mandate.

I am confident that the first-hand information which the Security Council received during this mission will enable the Council to live up to its responsibilities and take an informed decision on the issue that is now before us.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Our delegation is grateful to our colleagues in the Security Council for the support they gave to the Russian initiative to organize a Council mission on the Kosovo issue. We are fully convinced that the outcome of this trip to the Balkans is reflected in its report and that this initiative was timely and necessary.

For us, the idea of the mission was that in order to resolve the Kosovo issue, the Security Council needed full information on the current situation of the settlement process. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Council members having the opportunity to form their own objective view, on the ground, of the situation with regard to the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), including achievement of the standards that have been approved by the international community for Kosovo, particularly with regard to ensuring equal rights and security for ethnic minorities in the province.

I would like to express our thanks to the Permanent Representative of Belgium, Ambassador Verbeke, for the high professional leadership he provided to the Council mission. We are also grateful for the leadership of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and also to the staff of the Secretariat here in New York for providing assistance in the conduct of the mission.

The mission's programme was wide-ranging and multifaceted. The central elements in its intense working meetings were the substantive talks between the members of the Security Council and President Tadic, Prime Minister Kostunica and other Serb politicians in Belgrade, as well as the exchange of views with leaders in the province of Pristina. Also important were the meetings with representatives of Albanian and Serbian communities, the Serbian Orthodox Church hierarchy and other faiths in Kosovo and delegates of Kosovo minorities, as well as with the leaders of UNMIK and KFOR. The mission's contacts with representatives of NATO and the European Union in Brussels and with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Vienna were informative.

What the Security Council members saw and heard during the trip to the Balkans is reflected in the mission's report. It gives in general a complete and balanced picture of the current situation in Kosovo, and it shows what has been achieved and what still needs to be done in terms of filling the gaps in implementing resolution 1244 (1999) and the standards.

Council members saw some progress in terms of legislation and in the process of establishing functional provincial institutions. However, the results that have been achieved in Kosovo in terms of establishing normal and dignified living conditions for all the population and establishing the basis for a multi-ethnic community in which all members of all communities could live together in equal conditions of security can in no way be called satisfactory.

No peripheral positive elements can compensate for the shortcomings in implementing the key elements of resolution 1244 (1999) and the international standards, particularly with regard to the return of non-Albanian internally displaced persons. We cannot accept the situation where, of more than 220,000 Serbs who previously lived in the province, eight years later no more than five per cent have returned; where, of a Serb community once 40,000 strong in Pristina, today there are only 87; and where, in Pec, there were formerly 18,000 Serbs, there are now fewer than 10.

The efforts by the international presence clearly have not brought the necessary results. It seems that the structures have been set up and the mechanisms

have been provided, but the people are not returning to the province. We have seen the situation in Svinjara, where there are still empty houses for internally displaced persons. Mission members could see for themselves that the Kosovo Serbs, with all their heart, want to return to their homes in Kosovo.

All this clearly demonstrates the continuing serious obstacles in the return process. As stated in the report of the mission, the most important of these were the concerns of Kosovo Serbs regarding security and freedom of movement, the lack of economic prospects and the problems and lack of coordination in the structures intended to assist the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The return of refugees would not be facilitated by early decisions predetermining Kosovo's status.

During the mission on the Kosovo issue, Security Council members could see for themselves the miserable situation of isolation still experienced by the majority of Kosovo Serbs, particularly in village enclaves. A clear example of that is the situation of Serbs in Orahovac. I should mention that this situation is very different from the one in northern Mitrovica, where a significant number of Albanians live alongside Serbs.

Meeting with representatives of the Serbian communities, members of the Security Council mission could see for themselves that the situation that existed in March 2004 — when there was large-scale anti-Serb violence — has not been overcome, which has undermined Serbs' confidence in their future. The wounds of the 1999 conflict have not healed. The continuation of these trends in the effort to achieve a multi-ethnic Kosovo may be seen through the lack of success achieved in the international community's efforts to establish multi-ethnic reconciliation in the province.

Resolving that situation will require considerable time and effort. The Security Council mission received promises from the Pristina authorities that they would implement the standards. However, as we have stressed many times in the Council, we must consider the concrete measures actually being taken to reassure non-Albanians. The efforts being made are clearly not sufficient, as shown by the lack of Kosovo Serbs in the province's institutions of self-government. Measures must be taken to ensure that there are no obstacles to the return of refugees and that the multi-ethnic fabric of Kosovo society is restored.

We believe it is extremely important that the Security Council received confirmations from NATO authorities, the international presence in Kosovo and the provincial authorities that no ethnically motivated violence would be tolerated and that violence would not be allowed to define the political process.

We note that the international presence is prepared to continue providing reliable protection for Kosovo religious sites. With regard to Serbian Orthodox churches in Kosovo, we must express our regret that, during our meeting with Bishop Artemije, we noted that no progress has been made in rebuilding the churches destroyed during the anti-Serb demonstrations in 2004.

The Russian Federation continues to believe that imposing any decision on the status of Kosovo would be counterproductive. We noted a consensus regarding that point not only among the authorities in Serbia and Belgrade, but also among the representatives of Serb communities with whom the mission was unable to meet. In accordance with norms and principles that are internationally recognized, including in Europe, concerning the rights and status of minorities, any decision on status must be supported by all the major ethnic communities in Kosovo, including, of course, Kosovo Serbs. The Security Council has emphasized on many occasions that any future decision on status must be acceptable to the entire population of the province.

The Council has clearly established that political progress in defining Kosovo's future status requires continued implementation of the standards. Those two tracks, of course, are closely interlinked. Unfortunately, the talks on status were hastily and prematurely suspended, and, as the Security Council has seen, standards implementation is far from attaining its intended objectives. Both factors confirm the need to give both parties the time needed to achieve a negotiated settlement.

Once again, we reiterate our view that the proposal by the Special Envoy, Mr. Ahtisaari, cannot provide the basis for a final settlement on Kosovo from the Security Council. Adopting a plan based on that proposal would not only clearly set a negative precedent for international practice, but would also have dangerous consequences for regional and

international stability: by rewarding separatism it would encourage that phenomenon in other regions, and could spark a chain reaction that would eventually affect regions throughout the world.

We have a constructive alternative to the ideas set out in Mr. Ahtisaari's proposal. It includes continued implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), taking the ongoing talks into account. But the elements in the Special Envoy's proposal that can be considered as enjoying the support of both parties should be implemented without waiting for the negotiating process to conclude. The status situation must be resolved on the basis of a compromise between both parties. We must patiently continue the negotiation process while the standards are being implemented.

We note in particular that, as the Security Council's visit to Belgrade showed, the Serbian party is open to continued dialogue with Pristina and is prepared to demonstrate flexibility in the future negotiation process. We hope that the Kosovo Albanian side will also find a way to make compromises and continue this process.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to thank Ambassador Verbeke for his successful leadership in heading the Security Council mission to Belgrade and Pristina. Both at the organizational stage and as it was being carried out, the mission benefited from his great diplomatic skill, which made it possible to fully attain the objectives set. All of that is reflected in the report (S/2007/256), whose balanced content duly attests to the work accomplished.

From the very moment that the mission was proposed, Peru joined those who considered it favourably. We are pleased that it took place, because it enabled our delegation to gain greater clarity with respect to various elements, among which we wish to highlight the following.

First, the wounds of the 1999 conflict are still very visible. That is why reconciliation among communities and the integration of minorities — particularly Serbs — into a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo will require a significant amount of time and sustained international follow-up.

Secondly, the current situation in Kosovo is the result not only of political developments since 1999, but also, and in particular, of events that occurred before that year in the former Yugoslavia in general and in Serbia in particular. In that connection, a decision on Kosovo's future status will have to be taken from a broad political and historical perspective, beginning with the process of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the degree of autonomy that Kosovo enjoyed there — autonomy that was later snatched away.

Thirdly, recognizing that tradition of autonomy makes it possible to better understand the profound and irreparable impact of the 1999 conflict on Kosovo society, as well as the progress noted in preparing Kosovo's provisional authorities to be in a position to take charge of their own destiny as soon as possible.

Fourthly, the combination of elements I have just described leads to the conclusion that returning Kosovo to Serbian sovereignty is not a realistic solution for this situation.

Fifthly, we were also able to note the European Union's heightened level of commitment to the Balkan situation, including its readiness to assist Kosovo in future institution-building.

In that context, the Ahtisaari proposal brings together the requisite components to ensure peace and stability in the region. That is because, first of all, it establishes a model for the political organization of an independent Kosovo; secondly, it sets out a series of guarantees for minority communities in Kosovo, in particular the Serbian ethnic minority; and, thirdly, the commitment of the countries of the European Union serves as a guarantee of stability, not only with regard to Kosovo but also with respect to other Balkan countries, including Serbia. That is a central element, as Peru has always favoured solutions promoted by countries of the region in which a conflict is taking place.

My delegation will therefore be in a position to support a draft Security Council resolution endorsing the proposal of the Special Envoy.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank our Belgian colleague Ambassador Verbeke for the manner in which he led our mission, during which he once again displayed the great diplomatic skill for which he is well known.

I believe that the Security Council mission achieved the objectives we had set for it. We sought to gather direct and precise information about the

situation on the ground and about the positions of the various protagonists. I believe it was also important to demonstrate to the people concerned the importance that the Security Council attaches to the issue of Kosovo.

I would first like to refer to the regrettable fact that the positions of the parties are irreconcilable. That was clear during the entire mission. Unfortunately, that inescapable fact will not change with time.

During the visit we were also able to take note of the progress made since 1999, in terms of security, the establishment of institutions and the protection of minorities. That progress must necessarily be followed up. Our goal is to promote Kosovo's development towards a fully multi-ethnic community. That requires a long-term commitment on the part of both the Kosovo authorities and the international community. It also requires further efforts to encourage the return of refugees and displaced persons.

We are more convinced than ever that the only way to achieve that is by leaving behind the transition period that Kosovo has lived through since 1999 and by giving Kosovo a new status. That was in fact the conclusion reached by the Council in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2005/51) of 24 October 2005. Maintaining the status quo would be a destabilizing factor.

The process of negotiations on future status is now entering its final phase. I believe that the Security Council now has at its disposal detailed and realistic proposals, which have the support of the Secretary-General, to ensure the future of Kosovo while maintaining regional stability and protecting minorities. We believe that it is now up to the Security Council to take up its responsibility to guarantee the success of a process that it itself began.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by welcoming you, Mr. President, as the Permanent Representative of the United States of America. We are pleased to see you presiding over the work of the Security Council for the first time. I wish you every success. We are confident that, thanks to your wisdom and diplomatic expertise, you will be able to successfully lead our deliberations.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Verbeke, Permanent Representative of Belgium and head of the Security Council mission on the Kosovo issue, for his outstanding role in the mission's success. I would also like to thank him for the report (S/2007/256) he presented today on the activities and outcome of the Council's mission to Kosovo.

There is no doubt that the Kosovo issue is among the most important questions before the Council this year. The Council has been seized of this matter for more than eight years. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has achieved many positive results. In that regard, it may be advisable to look seriously into Kosovo's future status, especially in the light of recent developments.

In that connection, the Council mission to Pristina, Belgrade and Brussels was extremely important and timely. Its purpose was to provide more information to the Council on the situation in Kosovo through first-hand knowledge of developments not easily acquired otherwise. I believe that when the Council adopts further measures on the future status of Kosovo it will understand the situation and its socio-economic dimensions and will be able to adopt decisions wisely.

The mission reached a conclusion of which we were already aware, namely, that there is a gap between the positions of the two sides and that in the present situation it has been impossible to bridge that gap. Nevertheless, we know that it will be useful to use as a starting point the positions expressed by both sides concerning a permanent settlement of the situation — including the future status of Kosovo. That must be done through various means, including by utilizing the modalities set out by Ambassador Ahtisaari in his report to the Council (S/2007/168 and Add.1).

In order to deal with this situation successfully, we should take into consideration the genesis of the crisis, the circumstances in Kosovo and the need to address political and security issues there. The situation requires careful consideration by the Council. We must work sincerely and continue to focus on our ultimate objective: stability in Kosovo and throughout the Balkans.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to express its highest appreciation to the head of the mission, Ambassador Verbeke, for his very able stewardship and finesse in guiding our mission.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretariat for organizing the mission, as well as to all parties that facilitated the work of our mission to Kosovo.

Being a newly-elected member of this body, the delegation of Indonesia has amply benefited from the visit. For that reason, we would like to thank the Russian delegation for proposing the visit at a time when the Security Council has to decide on the future of Kosovo.

The visit has given us detailed information and valuable inputs on the issue under discussion. Meetings with various political, religious and community leaders, as well as field visits, enhanced and refined our understanding of the various dimensions of the issue at hand. We can comfortably and confidently assert that we now have a better and clearer view of the issue.

The mission confirmed our perception that the issue of Kosovo is a sensitive and delicate matter, and that it may be difficult to find a good solution that can satisfy both sides. However, we are determined to take steps to assist the region in moving forward in a peaceful and just manner. To that end, the legitimate concerns of all sides have to be taken into account.

Geographically, Indonesia is located far from Kosovo. In its political considerations, however, the issue of Kosovo is close to all of us. This is an issue of human tragedy; it is an issue of protecting civilians; and it is also an issue that has consequences far beyond Kosovo's natural borders. For those reasons, my Government is following the issue with great caution.

During the visit, we could vividly sense the deep animosity among communities that hinders cooperation and dialogue. While the issue of internally displaced persons and refugees fleeing by the hundreds of thousands has yet to be resolved, the most important need is the creation of a suitable environment for reconciliation. The region can come to terms with the past and build an enduring peace only if the communities are ready to accept and work out their differences. It is a moving experience to see families torn apart by violence and taken away from their familiar roots. The Security Council has a moral obligation to heal the wounds of those communities so that they can embrace today and plan for the future.

Reconciliation has never been easy or smooth sailing for any society torn apart. It is a long and difficult journey. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix or shortcut. There is only a long and difficult route, but it is a journey worth taking. Without reconciliation, those societies will forever live in a world filled with hatred and bigotry, no matter what the change of status may be. Violence will recur no matter how we try to prevent it. It is a matter only of when and where, and not of why.

The visit and today's meeting are overtures for more constructive discussion and consultations among members of the Security Council. Indonesia, for its part, is ready to continue extensive consultations with all relevant parties, in particular members of the Security Council, to find a way of dealing with the matter in a just, balanced and comprehensive manner. The weeks and months ahead will be difficult for all of us, but the success of our visit is a good omen for the Council.

Finally, let me once again reiterate our appreciation to the head of the mission, Ambassador Verbeke.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I, too, would like to thank Ambassador Verbeke for his statement at this meeting and for his exemplary leadership of the Security Council mission to Kosovo.

We also acknowledge the commendable role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the staff of the Secretariat in New York, which to a large measure contributed to the success of the mission.

The meetings in Brussels, Belgrade and Pristina, as well as the field trip undertaken to Kosovo at the latter end of the mission's visit, brought home vividly the issues involved in determining Kosovo's future, including the prospects for a negotiated settlement and the implementation of the agreed standards, especially those relating to the protection of the rights of minorities and the return of internally displaced persons. We commend the Special Envoy for his efforts aimed at resolving those issues by coming up with a comprehensive proposal for the settlement of the future status of Kosovo.

In Brussels, the Secretary General of NATO, apart from expressing his support for Kosovo's independence, asserted his organization's readiness to

respond to security challenges and to lead the international military presence in Kosovo, as envisaged in the settlement proposal. Further, he defined NATO's responsibilities, which include the supervision and training of the future Kosovo Security Force. The Special Envoy of the European Union for Kosovo was also unequivocal in his support for President Ahtisaari's recommendations and settlement proposals. The impression gathered at the end of the visit to Brussels was of the readiness of the two institutions to live up to their responsibilities if they were entrusted with any functions in an independent Kosovo, should the Security Council so decide.

It was apparent that, even though Serbia recognized the need for a change in the status of Kosovo, it was not in favour of President Ahtisaari's proposals and would prefer direct talks between Belgrade and Pristine. In the opinion of the Serbian Government and the representatives of political parties to the National Assembly, the problem can be resolved through supervised autonomy.

The visit to Kosovo, among other things, informed me further of what UNMIK had been able to achieve in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). As far as the security environment in Kosovo was concerned, the Kosovo Force's effectiveness and readiness to deal with any threat to the peace and security of Kosovo were evident.

The leaders of Kosovo invariably asserted their support for the settlement proposal and status recommendation, and were enthusiastic about independence. They stated in no uncertain terms that any further delay in the status process would be detrimental to Kosovo and that they were ready to assume the responsibilities associated with independence. On the other hand, Kosovo Serb representatives indicated that the settlement plan was generally unacceptable because the mechanisms envisaged in the settlement proposal for the protection and promotion of minority rights were insufficient and would not be implemented. It is worth mentioning, however, that the Turkish, Bosniak and Roma communities supported the Special Envoy's proposal, despite what they perceived as shortcomings, and believed that it offered a good basis for Kosovo's future.

It was obvious that the number of Kosovo Serb returnees was much lower than expected — a situation that can be attributed to mistrust, lack of reconciliation, and the poor economic situation in the areas of return. The return of internally displaced persons remains a critical element in the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), and only a safe and secure Kosovo would facilitate the return process.

We recognize the need to resolve the issue of the future status of Kosovo as soon as practicable, and support in principle the adoption of a resolution following the submission by the Special Envoy of the comprehensive proposal on the Security Council mission. We hope that the Security Council will work assiduously towards the realization of that objective.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting.

The Chinese delegation would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Belgium, Ambassador Johan Verbeke, for his leading role as head of the mission and in drafting the mission's report. China endorses the information and recommendations contained in the report.

Through this mission, the Security Council has obtained first-hand information on the Kosovo issue and direct experience of the achievements, difficulties and expectations of the people of Kosovo, of all communities, in the process of reconciliation and reconstruction. We noted the remarkable progress in implementing the agreed standards between the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and UNMIK.

In addition, the different sides are also aware that there is still room for continued improvement insofar as the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the agreed standards are concerned, especially the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as the protection of rights of ethnic minorities. Comprehensive implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the agreed standards has a bearing on the well-being of all the communities of Kosovo, which should not be compromised because of the political divergences.

We are deeply concerned at the continued segregation and the lack of interaction between the Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo. We hope that the political leaders there will abide by their commitment to build a Kosovo for all its communities and will try their best to take all necessary measures to

create a favourable basis for the ultimate settlement of the future status of Kosovo.

Ever since the submission of the comprehensive settlement proposal by the Special Envoy Marti Ahtisaari, the future status of Kosovo has drawn increasing attention from different sides. Indeed, one of the focal tasks of this mission was to listen to different sides in order to get to know their concerns. As stated in the report of the mission, the positions of the sides on the settlement proposal remain far apart. We are always of the view that the best option is to encourage both Serbia and Kosovo to continue their negotiations in order to gradually narrow their differences in an effort to achieve a settlement acceptable to all sides. We believe that it is normal to have differences, and these differences accentuate the need for further negotiations, rather than constitute a reason for the international community to give up efforts to promote talks.

The Kosovo issue is quite involved and convoluted. It also has extensive implications for other issues. Maintaining the status quo is not a solution. Furthermore, the status quo will be difficult to sustain. How to handle this issue properly will be a major challenge for the Council. All sides need to reflect on the ways and means to promote reconciliation and common development between the communities to the greatest possible extent, maintain lasting peace and security in the Balkan region and preserve the integrity and authority of international law. On this major issue, adequate patience, flexibility and caution are necessary and worthwhile. China is ready to work with other members of the Council in a constructive manner to find an appropriate solution.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, for taking up your functions as President of the Security Council and assure you of the support and cooperation of the mission of Panama. I would also like to thank Ambassador Verbeke for having led our mission to Kosovo in the transparent and efficient way he did. I also thank him for the report, which thoroughly reflects our experiences during the mission. I cannot fail to thank Ambassador Churkin for having had the excellent idea of a visit to Kosovo. I think it enabled us — some of us, at least — to have a much clearer vision of the realities in that region.

Since taking up this post in the Security Council, I have constantly been impressed by the power and authority that the Security Council of the United Nations has. We sit here, discuss and decide on the fate of territories and of human beings. The decision we have to take today is particularly significant because it is about just that — a matter of discussing the political integrity and identity of a people and a territory. In voicing opinions on this topic, we are doing so with the respect and deep reflection that this reality requires of us.

Everyone is well familiar with the political process that took place over the past five years — the situation of conflict and genocide in Kosovo — which we called catastrophic at certain times. We are also familiar with the efforts by the European Union and NATO to create institutions of government and to pacify the region, in accordance with the instructions of the United Nations.

Nevertheless, today we are at a complex, difficult crossroads. Everyone agrees or affirms that the status quo is Kosovo is not sustainable. Some think that it is up to the Security Council to take action immediately and adopt a position in this respect, and they believe that the way to do so is to support to the programme presented by President Ahtisaari. Others feel that the negotiations have not run their course, that there has not yet been enough discussion of the status issue, and that a more expansive process of discussion will be required. But everyone agrees that an agreement between the parties — forgive me for being redundant — would be preferable to any other solution.

Faced with this reality, I ask that we take into consideration the possibility that this Council adopt, now, President Ahtisaari's government programme for Kosovo, but I propose as well that this decision not come into force right away — in other words, that there be a six-month waiting period, and that during those six months we resume negotiations to ensure that both Serbia and Kosovo can come to an agreement, which in my opinion can be far better than what we have in hand today.

If I were asked what interest the Kosovar Albanian authorities could have in reaching an agreement if they know that they can ultimately attain independence, my sole answer would be that, in my view, they — as well as the European Union and the rest of the world, I should think — understand that an

agreement between the parties would be better than an imposed solution. And if I were asked what interest the Serbs could have in a negotiating process if they know that the outcome has been predetermined, I would respond in a similar way: In my opinion, it is preferable for the Serbs — as well as for the entire region and for the Kosovars — to put an end to the problem through an agreement between the parties than through an imposed solution.

It would be regrettable if the Council were divided when it took a final decision. It would be regrettable too if the Council, even though possessing the necessary majority, were unable to adopt a decision owing to the veto power of one or more permanent members. I call upon my fellow members to rethink this process, to consider all the available options and to take every reasonable — and I stress "reasonable" — opportunity to ensure that Serbs and Kosovars alike can reach an agreement on their future, an agreement that has not been imposed from on high.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): In taking the floor for the first time this month in a public meeting, Sir, I sincerely wish you all success as you discharge your responsibilities as President of the Security Council. I also thank your predecessor, Ambassador Jones Parry, for the wisdom and effectiveness with which he conducted the work of the Council during the month of April.

I wish also to express my most sincere appreciation and gratitude to Ambassador Verbeke for his extremely able leadership during the Security Council mission. Nor can I fail to express our most sincere appreciation to the Secretariat: in a mission that was very complex logistically, its members provided us with precious assistance. Here, I thank Ms. Norma Chan of the Council secretariat.

As has been said by others, our mission to the region was indeed a fruitful and extremely interesting opportunity to obtain first-hand information on the ground. The report (S/2007/256) drafted by Ambassador Verbeke accurately depicts the meetings and the visits that took place during our trip.

After eight years of administration through the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the situation in Kosovo remains complex. Progress has been achieved, but more remains to be done, particularly in standards implementation. Our challenge is that of achieving progress without slowing down the status process, which needs to be brought to a conclusion.

Indeed, the "overall security situation in Kosovo remains calm but tense", as the report rightly states (*para. 55*). We must be aware that in this context it is of paramount importance to establish a momentum that will bring about future status. Special Envoy Ahtisaari's comprehensive proposal provides us with an accurate and detailed set of principles, rules, regulations and procedures that should allow the new status framework to operate.

Within that framework, the European Union will be involved in managing particularly critical aspects of Kosovo's administration, such as the police and the justice system. We must ensure that the European Union — together with NATO, which must be confirmed as a vital element of the international security setup in Kosovo, and with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — will be able to carry out its tasks effectively, with the utmost legal and international backing.

The European Union is committed to establishing a large-scale operation in Kosovo — indeed, as others have recalled, the largest it has ever undertaken, entailing the deployment of highly qualified personnel and large financial expenditure. The operation has been planned this way because stability in the Balkans is viewed as a strategic issue directly affecting European security. I might add that this is a particularly relevant issue for Italy, considering our close links as a country neighbouring the region. We therefore remain of the conviction that the long-term solution to all pending Balkan issues lies in the European perspective of all the countries of the region. Kosovo's future status must give impetus to that perspective, not only for Kosovo itself but also for Serbia and the region as a whole.

We must now endeavour to reach our objective of finalizing our work here in New York. At the same time, the dialogue among the parties must remain intense so that progress can be made in reaching a mutually satisfactory result. Our attention and our work must focus on drafting a resolution, which should achieve the widest possible consensus. I am convinced that success is possible. We must approach this problem with maximum goodwill and make an effort to bridge the existing gaps. I look forward to working together with all other Security Council members with

a view to reaching the necessary consensus for a manageable and long-lasting solution for Kosovo.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): I would like to join previous speakers in thanking the head of the Council mission, Ambassador Verbeke, and his team for all their hard work and for their skilful leadership of the mission, as well as for the excellent manner in which they handled the preparation of the report (S/2007/356).

My delegation shares the observations and conclusions contained in the report. We consider the report to be an important element paving the way for further informed discussion within the Security Council and an integral part of the background information on the Kosovo issue provided in all the relevant official Council documents and reports.

The activities and outcome of the mission have strengthened our belief that the issue of Kosovo requires urgent attention and action by the Council. We believe it is time for the Council to assume its responsibility by taking an appropriate decision concerning the future status of Kosovo, thus strengthening the security and stability of the region. In that context, I would like to reiterate our position, stated during consultations held on 3 April, in particular regarding the necessity of moving fairly swiftly towards the start of negotiations on a new, fully fledged draft resolution.

As we have already pointed out several times before, we believe that our commonly desired objective is the preservation and strengthening of the multi-ethnic nature of Kosovo. In practice, this will be measured by, among other things, the number of returns of Serb refugees and internally displaced persons. We believe that, to ensure the success of this endeavour, it is crucial to make further improvements in the complex conditions on the ground. In our view, this should be facilitated by the international presence in Kosovo for a further period. We are pleased to note that this is also one of the most important conclusions based on the outcome of the Council mission. In that connection, we would like to express our readiness to consider additional measures that could help us ensure better conditions for the return of internally displaced persons and for their lives.

In conclusion, let me say again that Slovakia supports the main European Union (EU) approach to Kosovo status determination. In our view, this should naturally be embodied in the wider prospects of a European future for the whole region, in line with the conclusions reached at the EU-Western Balkans Summit of Thessaloniki.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I should like to join other representatives in welcoming you, Sir, to the presidency of the Council for this month. I should also like to join those representatives who found the mission worthwhile and to thank the Russian Federation for its proposal.

It was very good for those of us who have spent a while visiting the Balkans over several years to see the prospects in Kosovo. I think that the prospects, the sense of hope and the sense of a European future came across very clearly. We thank Ambassador Verbeke for his leadership and for having produced the report. Through you, Mr. President, I would also like to thank the men and women of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), NATO, European Union (EU) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) missions there, who have done so much to advance normalization on the ground in Kosovo.

Kosovo, like the rest of the Balkans, is wholly surrounded by the European Union. This is not only a question of the future of Kosovo; it is also a question of the future of Serbia, and, by extension, of the whole region. We were saddened to hear in Belgrade so little about Serbia's own European future, and I would like to use this occasion to make clear that, as far as the European Union goes, that future is very much on offer, as it is for the whole of the Balkans region.

We believe that the report that has been produced is balanced. I should just like to say that we do not think that there is any equivalence between the events of 1999 and those of 2004 — the former having been the result of brutal repression by Government forces — but we do acknowledge that wrongs were done in 2004 and that those wounds will take a while to heal.

We share the concerns of other colleagues about the slow rate of returns. We would be very happy to find a vehicle for discussing how that might be accelerated. But I should like to say that it is not in our, or Kosovo's, gift to force people back to their homes, however much we might want them to go there. We do not believe, therefore, that that in itself is a determiner of the rate of progress on the status process or of the outcome itself. Even if all Kosovo Serbs currently

outside Kosovo were to return, they would still be a minority within Kosovo, no more than 10 or 12 per cent of the total population. But, as I have said, we would like to look for ways, along with other representatives and other international organizations, to accelerate that rate of return. But I think that, overall, we share Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rücker's assessment that obstacles to Kosovo's further development are status-related.

We have heard much wisdom today about the fate of a people and the Council's responsibilities in that respect. We have a status process that has not come out of the blue. Since 1999 and the adoption of resolution 1244 (1999), the international community has been working very hard on the Kosovo issue. In 2003 there were direct Kosovo Serb talks on technical issues. The Security Council has long backed a role for the international Contact Group in the Balkans, including in Kosovo just as in Bosnia. The Contact Group has been working since 2003 with the United Nations as well as with the EU and NATO. In 2004 there was widespread agreement to move to a comprehensive review of standards to see if the status process could be launched. In 2005 Ambassador Kai Eide concluded that it should, and that, once the status process was launched, it needed to come to a timely conclusion. Also in 2005, the Contact Group published some guiding principles for the status Envoy's work, and President Ahtisaari was appointed. All of those moves were backed by the Council. Mr. Ahtisaari has discharged his mandate to lead the status process and to produce an outcome, and it is that that we are considering.

I agree with the representative of China and also with the representatives of Peru and of Panama that status quo is not a way out and that there has been remarkable progress on standards. But I think that we all need to bear in mind that there is no prospect of an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, as the mission demonstrated. Thus each of those parties must take its own decision, and we have heard from the Kosovo side its declaration to implement the Ahtisaari proposals. The Council's role is to take up its responsibilities and to back the only viable vision for the future of Kosovo, and to authorize the EU and NATO to support that transition as they have supported normalization in Kosovo to date.

The United Kingdom supports the Ahtisaari conclusion that independence for Kosovo, under international supervision, is the best outcome for Kosovo and also the best outcome to advance regional stability and, by advancing regional stability, to accelerate the integration of the whole Balkans region into Euro-Atlantic structures. We also support the details of Mr. Ahtisaari's plan in that they provide for the best functional government that Kosovo can have while protecting minorities and cultural and other heritage. I believe that it is well known that Mr. Ahtisaari's provisions are the most far-reaching for minority protection that have yet been seen in Europe.

I think that it is also worth noting another feature of the proposals, which is the very important way that they give a role to Serbia in helping, in a pastoral sense, Kosovo's Serb communities in Kosovo and thereby give Serbia reassurance that its important role in the region is not overlooked. As part of this, Serbia and Kosovo will form some sort of joint council to consider minority issues. We think that that is a far-reaching provision and one that is extremely useful in the Kosovo context.

I should like also to state that in our view, as we heard from President Ahtisaari in Vienna, the package does indeed represent a compromise between the Kosovo and the Serb sides, and we commend it to the Council. We do not believe that other ways, such as supervised autonomy, can actually be made to work in practice. We do not believe that it would be right to ask organizations such as the EU and NATO to implement something that we believe will not work in practice, and I think we heard that very eloquently from the EU and also from the NATO Secretary-General.

I should like to conclude by saying that the Contact Group began this venture together after 1999, and we would very much like to cooperate with all partners, including those on the Council, to bring it to a successful conclusion. We did set ourselves last year a deadline of the end of 2006. That deadline was not met, largely because of negotiations on a new Government in Serbia, but we do not believe that there is anything now to be gained by delay. We believe that Kosovo is a sui generic case. We pledge to work constructively with colleagues. We are happy to look at ways of supplementing the Ahtisaari package, particularly to deal with minorities and internally displaced persons, but outside the framework of that package, so that we can indeed make more progress on the ground in building a truly ethnic space in the Balkans and bringing it into European-Atlantic integration.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States.

I came to New York as the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations on 23 April. On 24 April I left to go on the mission to Kosovo that we are discussing today. I mention this to convey to the Council the very high priority that my Government and I personally give to the resolution of the Kosovo issue.

I would like at the outset to thank the Russian Permanent Representative, Mr. Churkin, for having proposed the Security Council mission, and our chief, Belgian Permanent Representative Ambassador Verbeke, for his skilful leadership of the mission.

The trip, as the Council is aware, consisted of stops in Brussels, Belgrade, Kosovo and Vienna.

In Brussels, I was impressed by three points that I heard. The first point was that resolving the status of Kosovo was important for the European Union (EU), that the continuation of the current situation was not sustainable, and that the current situation poses a potential threat to the peace and stability of the Balkans and of Europe as a whole.

The second point I heard was that EU membership is the ultimate goal of both Kosovo and Serbia, but that clarifying the status of Kosovo was important for making progress towards that goal.

The third point was that the European Union is ready to shoulder their heavy responsibilities, as spelled out in Special Envoy Ahtisaari's proposal for Kosovo's final political status.

I am grateful that the EU has stepped forward to play a leading role in guiding a multi-ethnic Kosovo to a future in the European Union.

In Belgrade, I heard Serbia's political leaders reject the Ahtisaari plan. But their proposal did not take into account the history of the area and the polarization that has grown between Kosovo and Serbia due to the policy of ethnic cleansing during the Milosevic era.

In Pristina, we saw and heard that Kosovo's government, police and courts have taken more and more responsibility from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), to the point where Kosovo is today virtually functioning as an autonomous State. As we toured Kosovo, we saw the vestiges of violence and ethnic animosity, but we also saw signs of progress and the potential for ethnic coexistence.

When I reflect on the political views I heard in Belgrade and Pristina, I understand that there is no potential for compromise on the independence question. Nothing further can come about from these talks, and there is no potential for the passage of time to change the polarization in the foreseeable future. Therefore, delay, I believe, has no potential to help the situation. I think, on the other hand, that delay has great potential to destabilize Kosovo and the Balkans. The balance of international resources that sustain Kosovo today cannot remain in place indefinitely. UNMIK and the Kosovo Force are the pillars of an interim administration and security forces — not occupiers. Delay, leading to more delay, is not a policy; it is a prescription for rising resentment and economic stagnation — and unsupervised independence.

We should surely recognize that much remains to be done in Kosovo to implement fully the standards we have pronounced. But UNMIK tells us — and our trip made this clear — that we have made about all the progress we can make with the Provisional Institutions.

As I reflect on our stop in Vienna, I appreciate the work performed by Special Envoy Ahtisaari over the past 18 months. I am convinced that he has considered all relevant issues. He has proposed a compromise solution that offers far-reaching decentralization of government and elaborate protection for religious sites. The United States supports Mr. Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovo.

Kosovo is an entity administered by the United Nations that used to be part of Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists. The set of circumstances that brought us to this point exists nowhere else in the world. Recognizing this unique problem, Mr. Ahtisaari and, I know, the Secretary-General have proposed a unique solution; and the EU has stepped forward to become Kosovo's implementing partner for independence. The United States does not find this path forward to be perfect or easy. But what Mr. Ahtisaari has proposed is the best option for bringing to an end the last chapter in the dissolution of former Yugoslavia.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to help assure the success of this plan.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no further speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.